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WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

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Mr. Bryan Supports League of Nations but Suggests Certain Amendments

The league of nations is the greatest step toward peace in a thousand years. The idea of substituting reason for force in the settlement of international disputes is in itself an epoch-making advance. The constitution of the league, as announced, provides for three things which constitute in themselves an advantage, the importance of which can scarcely be estimated. First, deliberation before war—the investigation of all disputes of every kind and character before hostilities begin. This almost ends war. The idea is taken from the thirty treaties negotiated by the United States with three-quarters of the world. Our nation, therefore, gives to the peace league its greatest piece of machinery. Second, the reduction of armaments will make it impossible for a nation to prepare for war without notifying the world of its intentions. Third, the abolition of secret treaties, which will do much to prevent the combinations which lead to war.

If the league of nations did nothing more than provide these three things, our nation would be justified in supporting it to the utmost.

It is not to be expected that so great an idea as the league of nations would be made perfect in detail in so short a time. There are defects that should be corrected, and the fullest discussion of proposed amendments should be invited. The newspapers of Great Britain, France and Italy are not backward in the expression of their views as to changes that should be made. Why should the American people be silent? Ours is the nation most influential in the league, and most powerful because most disinterested. Its people should help by free and frank discussion to perfect the league. The President has done the best he could, but he will be aided by intelligent criticism from those friendly to the idea.

I venture to point out certain amendments that should in my judgment be made in the interest of a stronger and better league. First, the basis of representation is not fair to the United States. A comparison of voting strength will show that while our nation is the most powerful in the combination, whether measured by population, wealth or moral influence, it has no larger vote than nations much inferior in population, wealth and influence. This inequality ought, if possible, to be corrected, for justice is the only foundation upon which any institution can rest in permanent security.

Second, the terms of admission to nations that may desire to join hereafter are not fair. To require a two-thirds vote to admit a new nation suggests the social club, where a few

black balls may keep out an uncongenial applicant. This world league is for the world. The President has well said that our nation is not interested in a league unless all nations are in it. The qualifications for admission ought to be fixed, and then it ought to be made as easy as possible for those who are qualified to gain admission. Under no circumstances should the consent of more than a majority be required for the admission of any qualifying nation.

The faults of the constitution are to be found in its indefiniteness rather than in things positively objectionable. For instance, it is not stated with sufficient clearness that the Monroe Doctrine is preserved. Our nation is not asking to be permitted to assist in the settlement of European disputes, and, therefore, it ought not to be asked to give up its paramount influence in the western hemisphere as a condition precedent to its entry into the league. Then, too, it is not stated with sufficient clearness that a league member is not required to become a mandatory. It ought to be definitely stated that a nation asked to become a mandatory is at liberty to accept or decline. Again, it should be made clear that the league is not to interfere in the internal affairs of the nations belonging to the league. The league is for the settlement of international disputes, not for the adjustment of differences between a nation and its own people.

Another matter that should be made clear—and nothing can be more important than this—is that each nation has a right to decide for itself whether it will undertake the things advised by the general council. The language of the constitution, while not definite, would seem to indicate that no nation is required to furnish force to back up a decision of the council. But no doubt should be left on this subject. This nation cannot afford to allow a council in which it has so small a voice to carry it into war against its will. Our people will have

as much sense when the time comes to act as they have now and they will have more light to guide them. When the emergency arises and they understand all the circumstances and conditions, they may be willing to assist by force, but they cannot decide in advance or allow a council to decide for them.

The constitution of the league would seem to imply the right of the council to compel the declaration of an economic boycott by the members of the league. This is not quite so serious as the declaration of war, but economic boycott is likely to develop into a war and an economic boycott may be peculiarly advantageous to the nations that want to declare it. Our interests may not be identical in this respect, and we ought to have a right to say at the time whether we would declare such a boycott. I venture to suggest that the scope of the league's work might well be extended beyond what is now contemplated. A substitute for war must be able to deal with every situation that can become a cause of war. One of the most fruitful causes of war has been the necessity for expansion. Growing nations, feeling the necessity for more room, have often gone to war on some clumsy pretext when the real purpose has been to secure territory for an increasing population. The right to live is one of the inalienable rights. It is a primal right that must be recognized in nations as well as individuals. Nations exercise the right of taking unused land and distributing it to those who need it. So, if the league of nations is to substitute reason for war, it must be able to deal with claims that are made for the waste places of the earth. A nation feeling a need for more territory should be able to go before the league and present its claims, and point out the territory which it can use to advantage. The council should consider the claim and advise upon it, and the force of public opinion should be used to secure such an adjustment of equities as would afford a peaceable means of securing needed territory. Such adjustments could be made the easier if the league endorsed the proposition that any nation extending its sovereignty over new territory should stand ready to purchase the property of residents who do not desire to remain under the new sovereignty. The resident does not go with the land. He has rights independent and superior to the right to the land. If, against his will, he is brought under new sovereignty, he ought to be able to sell his property without loss, and choose a sovereignty of his own like.

I have suggested what seemed to me desirable changes, some being modifications, some being merely more explicit statements. I conclude as I began, that while we should endeavor to make the league as nearly perfect as possible, we should not allow its imperfections to lead to its rejection. We must take risks, no matter whether we accept the league or reject it. The risks that we take in accepting it are less than the risks we take if we reject it and turn back to the old ways of blood and slaughter. God grant that those who are entrusted with the launching of this great work may have the wisdom to so purge it of selfishness and greed, and so infuse into it the spirit of the Prince of Peace as to make it the end of war.

W. J. BRYAN.

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